

CASABLANCA

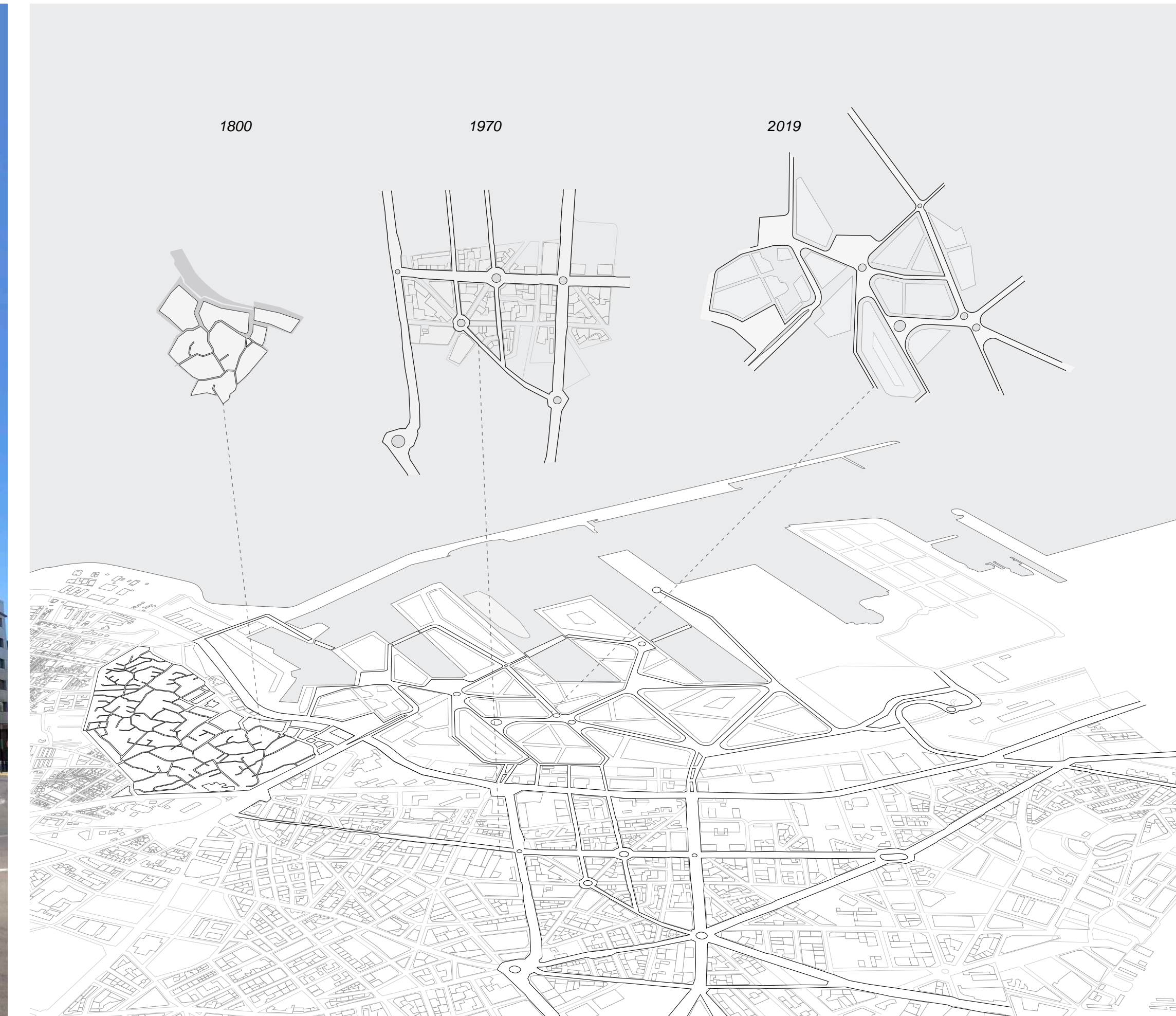
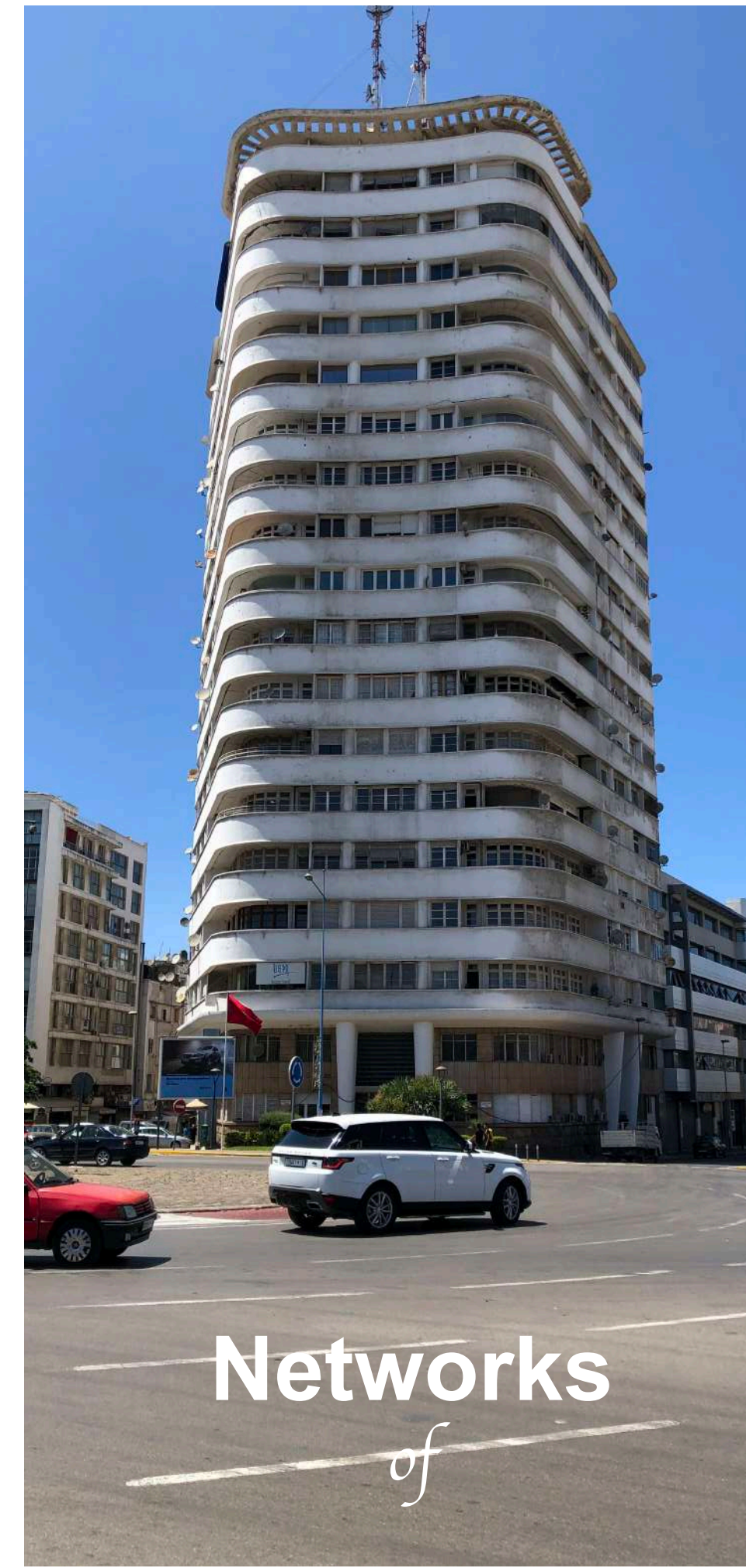
Colonial & Post-colonial Urbanism

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A Note on Modernism
Casablanca & Edward Said
Angelica Monroy

—the hallmark of modernist form is the strange juxtaposition of comic and tragic, high and low, commonplace and exotic, familiar and alien... (Said 186).

[illegible]

“A Note on Modernism” explains modernism as the previously mentioned new position on imperialism. Where imperialism is destructive, modernism is innovative; a display of the best practices France has to offer. According to Said, modernism possesses a pervasive irony that includes “two consequences of imperialism: the contending native and the fact of the other empires” (188-189). Modernism was born out of the realization that the great imperialist countries will not rule forever so to best assure the imperialist legacy lives on, “spatiality becomes...the characteristic of an aesthetic rather than of political domination” (Said 190). Like with any great discovery, the French wanted credit where it was due. Through the white man’s burden, they believed it was their duty to share the knowledge they have acquired through the years and as payment, their superior status will remain after decolonization. The French additions to the Moroccan city of Casablanca, like the Place Administrative and the new Medina, are examples of the synthesis of the French aesthetic and Moroccan historic forms, seeking to preserve their legacy.

The Place Administrative, orchestrated to mimic the French architectural streets and squares, is an effort to bring the "military and civic organs of the modern city" (Cohen 95). The tree-lined streets and squares, similar to that of Versailles, introduced in the governmental plaza are a primary example of the spatial knowledge brought to Casablanca, or legacy the French wish to bestow upon the Casablanca natives. Through large plazas, orthogonal visuals, and massive governmental buildings, a city could display its power. Larger than any plaza in Casablanca, the Place Administrative is spatially foreign, however, through the Marrast's efforts, the facades of the surrounding buildings display Islamic motifs. Used to sympathize with the existing Moroccan culture, Marrast believed these motifs would

be just enough to blend the grand European arches permeating the plaza thus alleviating any anxiety affecting the locals. The buildings within the Place Administrative are not Moroccan in any form. This brings the question, Built before Place Administrative, the new Medina in Casablanca is another embodiment of the modernist juxtaposition. The French intended to offer the locals a more sterilized space compared to the historic, Portuguese-built medina. The new Medina is located far from the old, more populated Medina with the new French city acting as the cultural barrier in between. This was not a mistake. The new Medina's role is to provide residency to the Casablanca natives that were not welcomed into the new French city. As Gwendolyn Wright explains in *The Politics of Design in French Colonial Urbanism*, the French “undermined the indigenous economy, the patterns of land use and social structure, and the cultural beliefs which once bound these together.” This is yet another example of the double-edged sword that is French modernism.

Moving on from the location of the new Medina, the architectural decisions made by the French also cement the negligence of modernism. The streets of the new Medina are wider and longer which removes the mysterious, maze-like nature of Moroccan medinas. Along the major street, Rue Sidi Okba, grand arches overpower the familiar Moroccan arcade. The direct result of the French foreign building language is that when the Medina is empty, any ounce of Moroccan culture escapes. However, when the vendors hang their handmade rugs and colorful pashminas, the richness of the Moroccan culture casts the artificiality of the new medina. The French disguised the relocation of innocent locals with what they thought would be a shiny new object Moroccans would prefer. The boldness of the French further drives the aggressive contradictory nature of modernism.

A note on modernism shows the intentions of the colonizer as double-sided. Seen in the *Place Administrative* and *New Medina*, the French believe they are doing the Moroccan people a service by bettering their city but they fail to realize the effects of using an established culture as a laboratory for European theories. Modernization combined with a disregard of the existing ecosystem leaves the local population with an irreversible synthesis of what is familiar and what is foreign.

Work Cited
Cohen, Jean-Louis, and Monique Eleb. *Casablanca: Colonial Myths and Architectural Ventures*. Monacelli Press, 2002.
Said, E. W. *Culture and Imperialism*. New York: Knopf, 1994.
Wright, G. *The politics of design in French colonial urbanism*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991.

